

Getting It Right

There's an interesting little experiment you can do. If you have a classroom of kids and you give them a bunch of tasks they can work on of varying difficulty, the kids will pick the tasks that are just outside their level, that stretch them to do a little bit more. (This is, of course, if they aren't getting graded on this. If they're getting graded, they'll always pick the easy ones.)

When I first heard about this experiment, I just assumed it was because they were good kids. But now I think there's a different explanation. It's because doing this is fun.

Working on something that's too easy for you isn't enjoyable, it's just mindless. (There's a reason few people play [50K Racewalker](#).) But doing something that's too hard for you isn't fun either. It's just like trying to run through a wall: you're not going to succeed and you're not going to learn much from it. So, like Goldilocks, the kids pick the task that's just right.

But it's not simply by default either. There's something actively enjoyable in itself about learning to achieve more. (I've [come to call this](#) the "Kipper effect", after the novel Kipper's Game which revolves around this idea.) There's a definite high to achievement, the rush of accomplishment, just as there's a corresponding low when you fail.

I'm looking for more research on this idea — and I'd be very grateful if anyone could point me to it. What kinds of things trigger the Kipper effect? Does it wear off? etc.

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October 13, 2006